GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
COMMUNICATIONS
LOK SABHA

UNSTARRED QUESTION NO:3407
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Digital Connectivity with ASEAN
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Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Government proposes to partner with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries to enable digital connectivity between the said countries and regions;

(b) if so, the details thereof along with the strategic and transformative impact thereof;

(c) whether the Telecom Equipment and Service Export Promotion Council (TEPC) has organized an inter-ministerial meeting between India and the ASEAN countries and if so, the details and the outcome thereof including the countries that participated in the said meetings;

(d) whether the Government proposes to launch a pilot project on BSNL network to connect the villages of the country with the world and if so, the details thereof; and

(e) the other steps taken by the Government in this regard?

Answer

THE MINISTER OF STATE (IC) OF THE MINISTRY OF COMMUNICATIONS &
MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF RAILWAYS
(SHRI MANOJ SINHA)

(a) & (b) Yes Madam. The Government of India has taken key interest and initiated actions in the engagement with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries to enable digital connectivity through telecommunications and ICT cooperation. This is reflected in its active engagements with ASEAN, that has grown from a 'Sectoral Partner' to 'Strategic Partnership' over years. With regard to SAARC, as the Chair of SAARC Working Group on Telecommunications and ICT, the Department of Telecommunications (DoT) is driving digital initiatives on SAARC platform.
ASEAN

The Government of India offered a Line of Credit of US$ 1 billion to promote projects that support physical and digital connectivity between India and ASEAN countries during 13th ASEAN − India Summit at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 21st November 2015. It was reiterated in the 14th ASEAN-India Summit on 8th September 2016 at Vientiane, Lao PDR.

Accordingly, a set of project proposals including setting up of a regional high-capacity fibre-optic network, national rural broadband network, digital villages in rural & remote areas and capacity building programmes was circulated to ASEAN countries and to ASEAN Secretariat during 2016.

SAARC

At the 18th SAARC Summit held in Kathmandu in November 2014, the Government of India renewed its commitment along with other SAARC leaders to substantially enhance regional connectivity through communication infrastructure and services and work towards reducing telephone tariff rates for facilitating greater contacts among the people of the region. During the Summit, India had offered to develop and launch a satellite dedicated to the SAARC countries. India had announced to extend National Knowledge Network (NKN) to the SAARC countries.

The DoT hosted the fourth meeting of the Working Group on Telecommunications and ICT in March 2015 at New Delhi, in which all the SAARC members were present. As an outcome of the meeting, a SAARC Joint Committee is constituted with representatives of SAARC members to work on reduction of call tariffs and providing sufficient connectivity.

The countries appreciated India's proactive initiatives which created a positive image for India. Further, the measures resulted in improved relations and coordination in telecommunication matters. The steps have created an ongoing engagement platform for cooperation in telecommunications and ICTs.

(c) In December 2016, the DoT, Ministry of External Affairs and Telecommunication Equipment and Services Export Promotion Council (TEPC) jointly hosted a meeting with ASEAN missions at New Delhi to discuss "Digital Connectivity" projects proposed to be

implemented in ASEAN countries by TEPC members. High Commissioners / Ambassadors / Representatives of all the ten ASEAN countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) participated in the meeting. The participants expressed active interest in the proposals and the proposals have been forwarded to ASEAN countries.

(d) The Government has taken steps to increase telecommunication penetration in villages. BharatNet project is launched to provide broadband connectivity to Gram Panchayats in the country.

(e) Other steps taken by the DoT in the arena are viz. 'Capacity Building' and 'Piloting of CDoT (Centre for Development of Telematics) technologies' in CLMV (Cambodia, Laos PDR, Myanmar, Vietnam) countries and Indonesia under ASEAN engagement. The Advance Level Telecom Training Centre (ALTTC), BSNL has conducted two training programmes for ASEAN countries in new technologies. The CDoT's scoping project on GPON (Gigabit Passive Optical Network) is already initiated.

Under the aegis of DoT, the BSNL has executed connectivity for primary links with Nepal, Bhutan and secondary links with Nepal for SASEC (South Asian Sub Regional Economic Cooperation) countries to connect 'Research and Training Centres'.

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